Faces . . .

A Woman Named Roma

America certainly has been a land of opportunity for Ireland's Roma Downey, who stars as Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis in NBC's six-hour miniseries, "A Woman Named Jackie," which begins Sunday.

Downey, 28, hails from the Emerald Isle's Derry City. "I'm the youngest of six," she says. "My one brother is a Catholic priest."

Not only is Downey the first actress in her working-class family, she is the first child to leave the nest. And her parents were worried when she told them in 1986 she was leaving Derry to seek her fame and fortune in New York. "I had to keep reminding them that unlike generations before who got on the coffin ships, we now have planes. I get home often and they've been over to visit."

Roma Downey: "I tried to capture an essence" of Jacqueline Kennedy.

Downey found her accent helped her gets roles in America. Within a few months of arriving in New York, Downey starred as Eliza in the Syracuse Stage production of Shaw's "Pygmalion." "I was allowed to join the union and I started getting roles Off Broadway and a leading role on Broadway in 'The Circle.' That was a dream come true."

After co-starring earlier this year in the short-lived NBC series, "Black Jack Savage," Downey got a call about "A Woman Named Jackie."

"I thought I was a strange choice because I didn't think I looked anything like her and I was Irish. But I am pretty good at accents."

Downey, who recently moved to L.A., knew very little about Jackie O before production began. "I had my work cut out for me. But I was provided with lots of old newsreels. They didn't want me to attempt an impersonation and that's not what I did. I tried to capture an essence of her."